

OPTIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FORM

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT NUMBER: OR-035-04-05

BLM Office: Baker Resource Area

Lease/Serial/Case File No. OR 60164

Proposed Action Title/Type: Denny Creek Fiber Optic Line

Location of Proposed Action: WM, T.11S., R.39E., sec. 11, E½SE¼SW¼.

Applicant (if any): Pine Telephone System, Inc.

Conformance With Applicable Land Use Plan:

This proposed action is subject to the following land use plan.

Name of Plan: Baker Resource Management Plan **Date Approved:** 7/12/89

This plan has been reviewed to determine if the proposed action conforms with the land use plan terms and conditions as required by 43 CFR 1610.5.

Remarks: Within Baker County Geographic Unit. Public lands are available for local rights-of-way. New rights-of-way should follow existing corridors whenever possible. Baker County has zoned the area Timber-Grazing. The proposed use is compatible with a Conditional Use Permit.

Need for Proposed Action: The subject right-of-way is a small portion of the applicant's Black Mountain project. This project would provide convenient and improved services with more dependability to residents in the area, including the ability to use high-speed data communications. It would also provide the applicant the capability to offer additional multiple services associated with modern telephone technology, should it elect to do so.

General Setting: The site is about 12 miles south/southwest of Baker City, about 2¼ miles south of Highway 7. The proposed right-of-way angles through a 20-acre parcel of BLM land along Denny Creek Road, a narrow National Forest access road running along the west bank of Denny Creek. The creek at this site flows in a small canyon with steep side slopes. Elevation averages about 4200 feet. Denny Creek Road is a constructed road with a surface of dirt, native rock, and coarse gravel. It has a traveling surface of about 15 feet in width and a total prism width of 20-25 feet.

Description of Proposed Action: The proposed action is the installation of an underground fiber optic cable. There would be no above-ground structures on the BLM portion of the route, except possibly a warning marker. The proposed route is along the edge of Denny Creek Road, on the side opposite the creek.

The cable would be buried a minimum of 36 inches and housed in PVC plastic conduit. It would be direct buried by using a narrow plow shoe pulled behind a heavy-duty crawler tractor. If rock is encountered, a backhoe or rock saw may be needed to excavate a trench for the cable. The disturbed soil and/or backfill material would be compacted using a small roller machine or the track of a second tractor.

Maintenance needs are expected to be infrequent, if ever. The depth of burial should minimize the possibility of damage to the cable during road maintenance events.

Alternatives: The only alternative considered is No Action, in which case the project would not be constructed.

Environmental Impacts:					
Critical Element	Affected		Critical Element	Affected	
	Yes	No		Yes	No
Air Quality	X		T & E Plants		X
ACECs		X	Tribal Concerns & Treaty Rights		X
Cultural Resources		X	Wastes, Hazardous/Solid		X
Environmental Justice		X	Water Quality, Drinking/Ground		X
Farmlands, Prime/Unique		X	Wetlands/Riparian Zones		X
Floodplains		X	Wild & Scenic Rivers		X
T & E Animals		X	Wilderness		X
T & E Fish		X			

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Description of Impacts: Air Quality: Effects would be minimal and caused mainly by dust raised during the installation of the cable. Effects would be highly localized and short-term.

Cultural Resources: A survey for cultural resources was conducted by a contract archaeologist. No cultural material was found.

Threatened/Endangered Animals, Fish, Plants: A Biological Assessment prepared by a contract Biologist for the entire Black Mountain project concluded that no special status species would be affected. Bull trout, listed as threatened, occurs in the upper reaches of the Powder River drainage, but not here.

Riparian Vegetation: The cable route is within 50 feet or less from the stream and its narrow riparian zone. There would be no direct impacts. Some minor indirect impacts may occur if loosened soil or fill material was to be washed off the road and deposited in the riparian zone.

Other Vegetation: Very little vegetation would be affected since the route is on a road. Some vegetation along the cutbank of the road may be disturbed or destroyed during the plowing and/or trenching. Blue wildrye appears to be the major perennial grass species.

Soils: All or most of the plowing and trenching activity would occur in the fill material of the road. Some soil adjacent to the road may suffer some minor impacts from dislocation and compaction.

Water: The route is within 50 feet of Denny Creek, a small perennial stream. There is a potential for loosened or stockpiled soil or fill material to be washed off the road and into the stream, thus affecting water quality. Any flow from the road would cross the small riparian area, so some filtering would occur. The route for the cable would be quickly backfilled (if trenching has been necessary) and compacted, so the threat of this would be short-term. If it were to occur, the effects would be minor and short-term.

Wildlife: The presence of men, noise and the general commotion during the work would temporarily frighten wildlife away. No habitat would be affected.

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Fisheries: The effect on fish habitat would be related to any effects on water quality, which would be minimal and short-term.

Livestock Forage/Management: This BLM parcel does not have a grazing permit; however, cattle apparently drift onto or through the parcel. There would be no effect from the proposed project.

Noxious Weeds: Since the installation would occur on a road, it is anticipated there would be virtually no effect on the spread of noxious weeds.

Timber Resources: The area is forested. Species observed include Douglas-fir, white fir, ponderosa pine, western larch, and western juniper. Some individual trees are quite close to the road, and therefore, to the proposed route of the cable. It is unlikely that any merchantable trees would be cut, however some small saplings or seedlings along the cutbank of the road may be disturbed or destroyed. Some limbing or trimming of larger trees may be needed.

Recreation: Denny Creek Road provides access to the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest for recreational and other activities. Other than some likely short-term disruption to traffic during the construction, there would be no impact.

Visual Resources: The project would be visible only during its construction. After the cable is installed, the route compacted, and subsequent travel on the road, it would disappear into the road and become invisible.

Land Uses/Rights/Facilities: As mentioned previously, the Denny Creek Road runs through here. There is no documented right-of-way for the road and it is not a county maintained road. It appears to be a public use road and appears to be occasionally maintained, by who is unknown. The road prism would be disturbed during installation of the cable, but there would be no long-term effect.

Access: Denny Creek Road is quite narrow and it is likely that it would have to be closed during construction. This would be short-term only.

Socio/Economic: The only impacts would be to the residents in the area who would receive the improved communications service necessary to fully participate in modern society.

Cumulative Impacts: The proposed BLM-granted right-of-way is a very small portion of the applicant's Black Mountain Fiber Optic Project. Nearly all of the route of the Black Mountain project is on existing roads. Therefore, total impacts would be minor and the incremental addition of the impacts considered in this report would be negligible.

Impacts of the No Action Alternative: Under this alternative, the above impacts would not occur. Ongoing impacts from the presence and use of the Denny Creek Road would continue. These include intermittent minor dust from traffic and occasional minor washing of material from the road which may at times reach the creek.

Description of Mitigation Measures and Residual Impacts: The following mitigating measures should be applied:

- Compact backfill material adequately to prevent settling and the creation of a “gutter” that may channel water.
- Repair the road prism as necessary.
- Spread and smooth any excess material within the road way.
- Clean vehicles and equipment of vegetative matter before entering or leaving public lands, to reduce the chance of spreading noxious weeds.
- Keep any necessary limbing and trimming of trees to a minimum. Avoid cutting any merchantable trees.
- Warning markers may be placed as considered necessary.

Residual impacts would be as described above.

Persons/Agencies Consulted: A call was made to the Baker County Planning Department regarding the zoning of adjoining private lands. The Forest Service provided some information about the Black Mountain project.

Preparer(s): _____

Environmental Coordinator: _____
